

**In Brief**

- Financial Times on Wednesday has reported the Indian Budget with a banner headline "India's prudent budget fails to excite investors". This is contradiction in itself. Investors are most likely to be inspired by a prudent budget.
- EU referendum is becoming more crystallised. Inevitably there are various internal stress coming from the governing party.
- Mohammad Ali is recommended for an honorary knighthood by several names from sports and business. Mr Ali is due to open a London exhibition about his life soon.
- Indian start-ups are looking to Chinese investment for funding. Could be win-win for both.

**Indian High Commissioner addresses MPs and Peers in Parliament**



**Bob Blackman MP, Ranjit Baxi, HE Navtej Sharma, the Indian High Commissioner, Alok Sharma MP, Dr Virander Paul, Deputy Indian High Commissioner**

The Indian High Commissioner **HE Navtej Sharma** briefed the MPs, Peers and other members of the Conservative Party in an event organised by the Conservative Friends of India (CFIN) at Portcullis House. This was the High Commissioner's first formal address to CFIN in

relationship by Prime Minister **Cameron** and his cabinet colleagues' visits to India and reciprocal visits by Indian leadership to the UK.  
**Alok Sharma MP**, Co-Chair of Conservative Friends of India, who had recently returned from India after his official visit

**EXCLUSIVE**

# Concerns over 20% drop in GCSE Gujarati numbers

younger age to come through the learning process so it will take a few years before the numbers start rising again for exams.

"I have met with the Department of Education (DfE) representatives and I understand the DfE and OCR (Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations) Examining Board are awaiting some results of a consultation. In this case OCR has the final say not the DfE whether the Gujarati exam paper continues or not. At this moment in time, all main political parties appear to be in support of keeping the Gujarati exam paper; however, it is the OCR Examining Board who will have to make the business decision on whether they continue writing the Gujarati GCSE and A Level papers beyond 2018

with the examination boards. They, however, did agree to brief Nick Gibb MP with responsibility in this area about our concerns. They also agreed to express our concern to the exam boards and to Ofqual. But kept emphasising that exam boards are independent bodies - as are schools. We then had to remind them about the government's duties to address minority concerns in a democracy - because schools and exam boards are also a part of the community, not independent of it.

"We are meeting the two Harrow MPs Gareth Thomas and Bob Blackman on Friday 4th March 2016 to brief them and to plan the next course of action. We have formed the Consortium of Gujarati Schools to help supplementary schools increase numbers, to improve the quality of teaching, learning and leadership and to make the Gujarati community more aware of the benefits of being bilingual by learning another language - Gujarati. We have formulated an Action Plan to support our schools. We plan to mount our first course for Gujarati teachers on 2nd April 2016. There is a lot more on our agenda and we are working on these issues with passion and zeal."



**Rupanjana Dutta**

Figures revealed by Schools Minister **Nick Gibb's** in an answer to Parliamentary Question tabled by **Gareth Thomas MP** has shown a shocking 20% drop in the number of students being entered for Gujarati between 2011 and 2015.

On 22 July 2015, **Nick Gibb** announced that the government has stepped in to secure the future of GCSEs and A levels in community languages. The Minister said, "There are considerable benefits to learning a second language and the government is keen to preserve a wide range of languages being taught at GCSE and A level including Polish, Gujarati, Panjabi, Bengali and Turkish."

Exam boards have said that there are a number of community languages which may not be continued at GCSE or A level but the government took action to work with the boards and Ofqual to make sure as wide a range of language subjects as possible continue to be taught in the classroom.

However in 2011, 553 were entered across England for GCSE Gujarati, including 280 in London. By 2015, the number of entries had

Parliament since assuming charge in January 2016. Describing the India-UK relationship as a "modern partnership reflective of contemporary realities", the High Commissioner briefed the audience on the recent developments in the bilateral relationship between the two countries, particularly against the backdrop of the successful visit by Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** to the UK in November 2015. While outlining the traditionally close links between India and the UK, the High Commissioner highlighted the impetus given to the

## New initiative to make Civil Service represent modern Britain

The Cabinet Secretary, **Sir Jeremy Heywood**, has announced a new network for senior civil servants from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds to help the Civil Service become more representative of modern Britain.

The network is being established to bring together BAME leaders together from across the Civil Service. The first meeting of the new network will take place on 16 March, where BAME members of staff will be encouraged to stand as visible role models and aim for higher roles and promotions.

Although the latest ONS figures show that

declined to just 442 across the whole of England, including just 224 in London.

Many supplementary Saturday schools teach Gujarati but have faced significant funding cuts as local authorities have had their funding cut back by central government which may explain the sharp decline.

Gareth Thomas, MP for Harrow West, is calling for the government to set up a Commission to explore what more can be done to help raise the numbers taking Gujarati at GCSE and A Level.

He told Asian Voice: "These figures will be profoundly worrying for all in England's strong Gujarati community. The Government needs to sit down with representatives of the community and educational experts to explore what more can be done to help increase the numbers' studying Gujarati at GCSE level."

"These figures indicate that the Government are quietly ignoring the educational needs of Britain's excellent, hardworking Indian communities."

**Daxa Parmar**, Chairperson, **Spinney Hill Gujarati Parents' Association** Leicester told Asian Voice, "I don't think there is one specific reason for the drop in numbers taking the A Level Gujarati exams: it could be that not all maintained schools offer Gujarati or promote take up of it. Majority learn Gujarati at supplementary schools in community setting and as a result the emphasis may be on learning the language and culture only. Also for supplementary school candidates it is extremely expensive to afford the exams; the prices I was quoted this year is £50.00 per paper and there are four papers. Many have acquired their GCSE qualification as young as 11-13 year olds and there is that dip in numbers until the next cohort who are currently of primary school or

zeal."

**Amrish Patel**, who advises those within the policy team at the Conservative party on issues related to Gujarati and wider Indian community told Asian Voice, "My own view is that Gujarati parents do not want GCSE Gujarati as a core subject in their children's education, unlike other ethnic minorities. OCR is a private business and if there are not enough children taking the exam, not enough revenue will be earned to setup exam papers and hire examiners."

"Unfortunately private Hindu schools unlike Sikh, Jewish & Islamic foundation schools do not have GCSE Gujarati as a core compulsory. Also the Sikh, Jewish & Muslim faith organisations ensure that they set a side fund to support and ensure parents are also advised to support there faith languages with compulsory reading of prayers and religious dialogues in the particular language. This unfortunately is not the case at our Mandirs."

"Gujarati parents push for French over Gujarati. Again changing such a mindset and the battle moving forward is not going to be easy without a National Coordinated Gujarati Community taking this as its number one priority. But if parents have little or no faith in its own language there is very little one can do."

GHU Gujarati School, which is open to all children aged six and above, teach Gujarati all levels (including for GCSE) and help students prepare for exams. Speaking to Asian Voice, school head **Kokila Patel** told Asian Voice, "Earlier every year, we had at least 6-7 children learning Gujarati to take GCSE exams. This year we have only 4. And we have no enrollment for next year so far. The number of pupils learning GCSE Gujarati is going down and it worries us."

"Gujarati community is positive and supportive and many schools have come together in their localities with this regard and we hope to form a National Forum which will speak with one voice for keeping Gujarati Language GCSE and A Level exams."

**Jayantilal Tanna**, Chair & **Vijaya Bhandari**, Secretary, Consortium of Gujarati Schools SE England told Asian Voice, "It is not just in Gujarati that the numbers have dropped. Modern Foreign Language entries have dropped by nearly 20% over the years which shows a declining interest in learning languages in our schools in the UK overall."

"Many of our modern Gujarati parents are themselves less equipped to help their children at home whereas previously it was not the case. The Saturday/Sunday schools offer only an hour's Gujarati a week which needs support from home that is not available."

"There is a bigger difference in the quality of teaching, learning, resources and expertise between mainstream and supplementary schools than in the past. This has an impact on children's interest and motivation to study Gujarati in supplementary schools."

"The officers of the Consortium of Gujarati Schools (SE England) met with Andrew Fisher and John Hopper at the DfE on 3rd February 2016, highlighting our concerns and seeking their support with teacher development and the rising rents and accommodation costs incurred by Gujarati supplementary schools. Both had a negative impact on intake numbers."

"They heard us in silence. They were tight-lipped and did not wish to give any information except to say that the DfE was still in consultation